



The Comptroller General
of the United States

Washington, D.C. 20548

Decision

Matter of: Monte E. Wilcox

File: B-235979

Date: January 5, 1990

DECISION

Mr. Wilcox, a Forest Service employee, was transferred to Vancouver, Washington, in May 1988. He was authorized and occupied temporary quarters for a period of 60 days. The temporary quarters rate in effect at the time of his transfer was \$60 a day for the first 30 days.

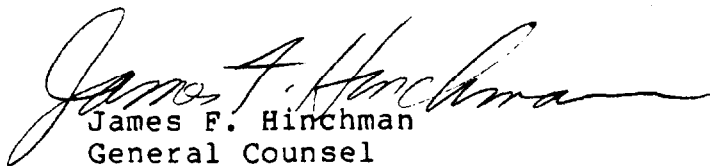
Mr. Wilcox's claimed cost of meals for the first 30 days totaled \$910.28, an average daily cost of \$30.34, and included grocery purchases since not all meals were commercially obtained. The Forest Service reduced the meal cost claim for this period by limiting meal reimbursement to \$25 for days when meals were commercially obtained (17-1/2 days), based on the agency's own survey of selected commercial restaurants, and to \$6.54 a day when groceries were purchased (12 days), based on information obtained from an April 1988 bulletin issued by the agency's Human Nutrition Information Service. Mr. Wilcox objected to these reductions and the agency submitted the claim for our determination.

Employing agencies are responsible to determine the reasonableness of claimed subsistence expenses on a case-by-case basis. Our Office will not substitute its judgment for that of the agency in the absence of evidence that the agency determination was erroneous, arbitrary, or capricious. Jesse A. Burks, 55 Comp. Gen. 1107 (1976), affirmed and amplified on reconsideration, 56 Comp. Gen. 604 (1977). We have accepted determinations by agencies to limit reimbursement for costs for meals and groceries which were based on statistical references such as figures from the Bureau of Labor Statistics or the Runzheimer Index to determine the reasonableness of meal costs. See e.g., R. Alex Martinez, B-231776, July 13, 1989, 68 Comp. Gen. —, and decisions cited.

In the present case, the information provided by the Human Nutrition Information Service affords a reasonable basis

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for the agency's action to reduce Mr. Wilcox's grocery costs. However, it appears that the commercial meals survey conducted by the agency in the Vancouver area may have understated the applicable costs. We have been informally advised by the General Services Administration that the cost range for daily meals commercially obtained in the Vancouver area was \$28-29, based on the Runzheimer Index figures for January 1988. While these figures do not support the employee's claim of approximately \$35 a day for commercially obtained meals, they do not support the agency's determination to limit Mr. Wilcox to \$25 a day. Accordingly, we are returning the claim to the Forest Service for a reexamination of the amounts claimed by Mr. Wilcox for commercially obtained meals. R. Alex Martinez, supra.


James F. Hinchman
General Counsel